



## Main Street Congregational Church

145 Main Street, Amesbury MA 01913

### February 2, 2025 - Blanket Rules

(Luke 6:1-16)

Following worship this morning we will gather for our Annual Meeting as we always do on the fifth Sunday of the year as per our bylaws. We meet and fulfill the rules and requirements of being a corporation in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This means reviewing reports from the previous year, having a warrant (that we post on the building - is this really the best way to communicate in 2025?) and adopting a ministry plan for the year to come. There are lists and financials. They matter. Having the meeting matters. For me, though, the heart of the meeting is not the legality, it is the gathered church coming together to honor the ministry that has been done and committing to be the church we hear God calling us to be in the future.

One year Kory had us form a circle around the sanctuary and we all had pieces of climbing rope and we connected ourselves to each other with that rope representing God's love. That was a profound exercise helping us to recall what it is to be church. This year, though I guess I am only now telling Lisa about it, I have a blanket that I have put on the communion table as a centering symbol for our annual meeting.

The blanket might look familiar. Last week it was a fish net in which Lydia got scooped up. This week, though, I am considering the blanket in more common blanket terms. There are two ways I am seeing it. First - the blanket that we wrap around ourselves for comfort and warmth. A blanket that can be used to shield us from things that are harsh. A blanket to hide within and find comfort. Second - the picnic blanket. Intentionally packed up and brought along but having to be taken out into the elements for using. Needing to be unfolded and spread wide in order to fulfill its role as a picnic blanket. The same blanket can be used in both ways.

This blanket imagery speaks to me of the way we approach Church and the way we connect to God. It's not one or the other. They work together. Grasping on to just one limits in so many ways. We need the reminder and connection to the love of God which enfolds us and supports us in order to open the picnic blanket wide and make room on it.

Let's focus first on the support, the comfort, the assurance of God's love close at hand. In the uncertainty and chaos that is everyday life, and as exacerbated and scary as that unsettled is in this present moment, the eternal, unconditional, transforming love of God is present, active and powerful. When the bottom is falling out and our hearts shattering with grief and concern the Holy is alongside making a way as the Sacred Mystery has done since the beginning of time and will continue to do without end. When we see cruelty and dehumanizing actions we can remember Jesus' commitment to the marginalized, his broad and inclusive welcome, his mercy and compassion and we can remember his way has been and will continue to be lived out by those who seek to follow him, the church, us. And we are supported by the eternal and infinite love of God.

This blanket we wrap up in is durable and of sacred substance. It can support us. It can energize us. It is not a shield from the world. It is not to keep us distanced from challenge. It is not a hiding place. It is a tool to heal and encourage so that we can be love and light in the world, so we can be part of God's way of bringing life.

I think the Pharisees who were chastising Jesus for breaking the sabbath were using the law like a barrier blanket. They were faithful. They were committed to God. The law was the way they showed their devotion. Yet their clinging to the law led them to condemn Jesus for being compassionate. Jesus knew the love of God. Jesus knew the laws for being a faithful Jew. Yet, when a person was hurting Jesus opted to heal. The law, a kind of blanket which defined them and gave them strength, needed to be transformed to a picnic blanket to feed and nourish. That's what Jesus did. He took the blanket of rule keeping for the Sabbath and spread it out as a picnic blanket. Those that were healed were grateful. Those whose ways had been disregarded were ticked off.

This gets us to the second use of a blanket. A picnic blanket opened wide to gather people together for connection and nourishment. And we can slide a little to the side and make room for more. Elizabeth's cookies on a plate. Arlyn's coffee in a carafe. Spread on the rocks of Star Island but pay attention there is a lot of gull poop. Spread on the beach at Plum Island but know the sand gets into everything. Spread on ground at the campsite where there are skunks and ants that can make their way.

Spreading the blanket in the challenges, brokenness and uncertainty of the world is our call. We work with God and each other to figure out how to do that so we might make a place and a world where all are welcome and all are fed. The picnic blanket that is Main Street Church is not large enough to cover all the world's needs but we don't let that stop us. We open ourselves to hear what God is asking of us. We open our picnic blanket to share that love with others. We gather at our Annual Meeting to give shape and substance to what our blanket will look like and where it will be spread. Amen.

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